August 2025

We write to congratulate you on being offered a place to read History at St Peter’s. We hope that you will find the next three years here stimulating and rewarding.

Now is the time that we begin to ensure that teaching arrangements are in place for the coming year; and in this connection, there is one important thing we must ask you to do, please, which is to make some choices about your programme of study for your first year. The other purpose of this letter is, therefore, to explain how the year works and the choices you need to make now. We fear that this will involve some exposure to Oxford University jargon!

The First Public Examination is known as the Preliminary Examination (Prelims for short). Prelims are taken at the end of the first year and, provided you achieve a pass mark, your performance is not classified (though distinctions are awarded) and does not count towards your final degree. The Prelims examination comprises four papers which you need to choose now. More information about those choices can be found at <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/ba-history> (under the section ‘Year 1 (Prelims)’).

1. In your first term, known in Oxford as Michaelmas term, you will study a period of **History of the British Isles** (BIP). You need to select one of the following periods (short descriptions of these periods can be found at <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/history-british-isles-first-year>):

I 300-1100

II 1000-1330

III 1330-1550

IV 1500-1700

V 1688-1848

VI 1830-1951.

2. In your second term (Hilary Term), you will study a period of **European and World History** (EWP). Your choice must fall in a different time band from your History of the British Isles period. You need to select one of the following (short descriptions of these periods can be found at <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/european-and-world-history>):

I 370-900: The Transformation of the Ancient World

II 1000-1300: Communities, Connections and Confrontations, 1000-1300

III 1400-1650: Renaissance, Recovery & Reform

IV 1815-1914: Society, Nation & Empire.

**Some guidance on choices 1 and 2**. You may not have studied medieval or early modern history at advanced level at school. To give breadth to your historical development you are required during the course of your three years of undergraduate study to complete at least one outline paper in the History of the British Isles or European and World History before 1330, one between 1330 and c.1700, and one after c.1700 (detailed lists of which papers count in which section are available at each stage of the course). In the first year, your European and World History course must fall in a different band from your History of the British Isles course to help meet this requirement. There are also regulations designed to ensure breadth of geographical coverage in your studies, but you do not need to think about those now.

We therefore **strongly recommend** that you choose either History of the British Isles I (300-1100) or II (1000-1330) for Prelims. There are intellectual merits in studying the periods consecutively and, if you choose BIP I or II now, it remains possible to continue through one of the later periods for the Finals work in the second year. It makes sense, too, for you to be taught in College during your first term, when you can benefit from being able to talk to one another about common historical problems. If you choose BIP I or II you can then choose for European and World History either III (1400-1650) or IV (1815-1914). We recommend that you choose EWP III unless you have already studied this period at school.

3. A **Historical Methods** paper in which you are encouraged to reflect on the variety of approaches used by modern historians, or on the ways in which history has been written in the past, to read historical classics written in a range of ancient and modern languages, or to acquire the numerical skills needed for certain types of historical investigation. You can choose any one option of:

1. a Foreign Text; or
2. Approaches to History; or
3. Quantification; or
4. or Historiography.

Please read the information carefully on the following link to make your Historical Methods choice: <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/historical-methods#/>.

**Foreign Text**: If you have a well-developed language (A-Level or equivalent), we strongly advise that you take a foreign text. Texts are available in Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, Spanish, or Russian; details of the texts can be consulted at <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/historical-methods#/>.

**Approaches to History** is concerned with the ways in which the writing of history has been influenced by other disciplines, methods, and techniques. You will be required to show knowledge of at least two different ‘strands’ for Approaches from the seven set out below:

(i) Anthropology and History

(ii) Archaeology and History

(iii) Art and History

(iv) Economics and History

(v) History of Women, Gender and Sexuality

(vi) Sociology and History

(vii) Histories of Race

(viii) Environmental History

You should feel free to choose whichever two strands appeal the most, but it may help to know that ‘Sociology and History’, and ‘Histories of Race’ will all be taught in St Peter’s College, whereas teaching for the other strands will be taught by tutors in other colleges.

**Quantification in History** aims to introduce historians to the statistical exploration of historical problems. It imparts statistical skills which enable students to read and understand quantitative economic and social history research, and to undertake elementary quantitative work on their own. Some numerical facility and training (preferably to A-level or equivalent in Mathematics or Statistics) is essential for those who are attracted to this option. This paper is taught by tutors in other colleges.

Formally speaking, you could do another paper on Historiography (‘Historiography: Tacitus to Weber’) instead of Approaches to History, but this is not taught at St Peter’s.

It is important that you make your choice between these three options – Foreign Text or Approaches or Quantification – now, because this paper is studied concurrently with your British and European and World History papers across the Michaelmas and Hilary terms. If you choose Approaches to History, it is also necessary to specify which of the two ‘approaches’ you would like to take.

4. An **Optional Subject** based on the study of selected primary texts and documents. A list of the optional subjects can be consulted at <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/optional-subject#/>. All Optional Subject sources are in English (sometimes using translations). This paper will be studied in the third term (Trinity Term), and you do not need to choose you optional subject until midway through your first year, allowing you time to explore possibilities and to discuss them with your tutors in Oxford.

To summarize, please select three of your four papers: the period of History of the British Isles; the period of European and World History; and your choice of Historical Methods paper between a Foreign Text (specifying in which language) or Approaches (specifying two ‘approaches’) or Quantification.

We would be grateful if you could respond by email as soon as possible, and by **29 August** at the latest to both [stephen.baxter@spc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:stephen.baxter@spc.ox.ac.uk) and [stephen.tuffnell@spc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:stephen.tuffnell@spc.ox.ac.uk). Once we have received your response, we will send you introductory reading lists for the summer and start to arrange teaching. If you are in doubt, please do not hesitate to contact us by email for further advice.

We hope you enjoy the rest of the summer and look forward to meeting you in the Autumn!

Yours sincerely,

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